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ABSTRACT

The Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education was appointed in October 1983 by the director of the National Institute of Education (NIE) to: (1) review relevant background materials from the archives of the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE); (2) review other background materials in other recent reports; (3) advise the director of NIE on further uses of those materials; and (4) suggest ways in which policy analysis and recommendations for improvement in American higher education can be developed and implemented. This first report presents a general assessment of the background materials, begins the discussions of issues related to excellence in higher education, and makes a limited set of recommendations. Background materials reviewed included those of the National Commission on Higher Education Issues (American Council on Education, "To Strengthen Quality in Higher Education"), the Business-Higher Education Forum ("America's Competitive Challenge"), the National Commission on Student Financial Assistance ("Signs of Trouble and Erosion" and "The Terrain of Postsecondary Education"), and, primarily, the NCEE ("A Nation at Risk"). Areas of inquiry focused on: student clientele; programs and learning environments of institutions; "providers" of undergraduate baccalaureate education; and the external influences on higher education. Recommendations are offered regarding education data collection/analysis, the NIE leadership role in revitalizing the Federal Interagency Commission on Education (FICE) and other areas, and the focus of research at NIE labs and centers. (LB)

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THE PROGRESS OF AN AGENDA:

A FIRST REPORT FROM THE STUDY GROUP ON THE CONDITIONS OF EXCELLENCE IN AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

May 1984

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The Progress of an Agenda:

A First Report from the Study Group on the Conditions

of Excellence in American Higher Education

I. Introduction

The Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education was appointed by Dr. Manuel Justiz, Director of the National Institute of Education, in October, 1983. The Group will meet seven times over an 11-month period and will present its final report in August of 1984. The Group has been charged with the following tasks:

(1) To review and analyze the background materials of relevance to excellence in higher education from the archives of the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE);

(2) To review and analyze the background materials of relevance to excellence in higher education of other recent reports and commissions;

(3) To advise the Director of NIE concerning further uses of the materials; and

(4) To suggest ways in which policy analysis and recommendations for improvement in American higher education can be developed and implemented.

In its first meeting, the Study Group determined that this comprehensive charge can be met effectively only if an agenda for improving quality in higher education is developed first. This agenda, in turn, requires a searching and

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comprehensive conception of quality or excellence to advance the discussions that have been stimulated by the various commission reports. It also requires consideration of what society can reasonably expect from higher education, and an assessment of the role of postsecondary institutions in student learning and development.

The Group has been charged to focus its work on undergraduate education and has delimited that focus to undergraduate baccalaureate education. This governing concept includes all students (traditional aged and adult) pursuing an education that can lead to a baccalaureate degree. Such education is found in a variety of contexts, including all traditional four-year colleges and universities, community colleges with "general studies" and/or transfer programs, and a variety of non-traditional degree-granting organizations. We consider any aspect of educational policy and practice that affects undergraduate education to be within the scope of our work. It is our fundamental assumption that questions of educational research and policy (institutional and public) about postsecondary education must be linked to teaching and learning. Thus, our principal interest is in undergraduate students and programs.

This document, the first of two reports in our charge, will:

(1) Present a general assessment of the archives and background materials on higher education assembled by the various national commissions that have reported to the American public during the past year;

(2) Begin our discussion of issues concerning the conditions of excellence in higher education that will be elaborated in our Final Report; and

(3) Make a limited set of recommendations appropriate either to the materials we have examined or to the scope of our discussions to date.

In accordance with our charge, the Final Report of the Study Group will propose an agenda for improving excellence with equity in undergraduate baccalaureate education that is rooted in the findings of research. The Final Report will cite the most relevant existing knowledge, will point to ways postsecondary institutions can use that knowledge in improvement efforts, and will propose strategies for the more effective dissemination of what we know about successful practices.

Our Final Report will also offer a research agenda that would aid in achieving the objectives set forth. The Study Group has determined that such a research agenda can be elaborated only in the context of what the Director of NIE referred to as a "blueprint" for improvement. The recommendations for improvement to be offered in the Final Report will be addressed principally to faculty, students, administrators and trustees of postsecondary institutions, and to the general public. The recommendations concerning research will be addressed principally to Federal and state agencies.

II. Background Materials of the Commissions

The Study Group and its staff have reviewed the reports and background materials of four different groups that released their analyses and recommendations over the past year:

- The National Commission on Higher Education Issues (American Council on Education), To Strengthen Quality in Higher Education;

- The Business-Higher Education Forum, America's Competitive Challenge;
- The National Commission on Student Financial Assistance, Signs of Trouble and Erosion and The Terrain of Postsecondary Education; and
- The National Commission on Excellence in Education, A Nation at Risk.

We wish to stress at the outset that our reviews do not constitute--nor are they intended to constitute--a rebuttal or critique of the reports of these groups. Rather--and in keeping with our assignment--these are analyses and assessments of the background materials assembled by these groups in the course of their work. Furthermore, we recognize that none of these groups set out to review and/or synthesize the existing literature on higher education, nor were they charged to do so. Thus, we did not look at the background materials in terms of what was missing as much as we used them to organize our own thoughts on higher education.

We have also read the final report of the National Commission on the Higher Education of Minorities (1981) and the final report and minutes of the National Advisory Council on Continuing Education. As we work toward our final report, we are systematically collecting materials from other important commissions-in-progress, most notably the Project on the Meaning of the Baccalaureate of the American Association of Colleges and the ACE Task Force on Higher Education and the Adult Learner.

Of the documents we examined, the record and archives of the National Commission on Excellence in Education were most voluminous, and our principal focus was on that record. Nonetheless, it is important to describe the nature and relevance of the background materials of the other three groups in light of our scope of inquiry.

National Commission on Higher Education Issues. The 57-member National Commission on Higher Education Issues was composed principally of college presidents and other distinguished leaders of higher education, along with a few corporate and government officials. The Commission held four meetings, and its report, To Strengthen Quality in Higher Education, made recommendations on such important topics as leadership selection, governance and centralization, finance, curriculum, tenure and post-tenure evaluation.

Although the commissioners decided "not to be a study group, not to have background papers prepared, and not to publish a voluminous report for wide circulation," certain strands of analysis in the small number of concept papers and drafts of the Commission's work were of interest to us, and suggested some potentially profitable lines of inquiry. For example, the papers emphasize the necessity of sorting out varying measures of quality in light of the different functions of higher education (from the direct provision of educational services to information storage and retrieval to the socialization of young adults) and highlight the structural and contextual restrictions on innovation in colleges and universities. They also point to a critical distinction between "quality" and "integrity," the latter allowing for judgment of a more diverse set of institutional missions than the former. In this analysis, "integrity" implies doing what is realistically possible given resources, capacities and clientele.

Business-Higher Education Forum. The report of the Business-Higher Education Forum, America's Competitive Challenge, was prepared in response to an invitation from President Reagan to make "a set of recommendations

designed to strengthen the ability of this nation to compete more effectively in the world marketplace." The Report takes as its central premise the assertion that "our society must develop a consensus that industrial competitiveness on a global scale is crucial to our social and economic well being." The report hence emphasizes business far more than higher education.

The background papers prepared for the Forum's work are "think pieces" employing generally accessible economic data. They focus on such topics as American science, industrial policy, America's competitiveness in world trade, and industry-university cooperation in research. The concentration on science and industrial policy in these papers results in discussions of the types of research and development that should be funded by the Federal government and of the reform of management practices in the international marketplace.

The Forum was concerned with productivity, and the major studies of productivity upon which it drew did not rank the quality of labor as important a factor as either capital investment or "technology." Thus, while paying some attention to structural unemployment in an aging workforce, and the necessity for a national approach to retraining, the papers analyze human resources principally as a science policy issue with two dimensions: (a) the supply and quality of trained scientists and engineers, and (b) the technical literacy and trainability of the general population. Some of the recommendations offered in the papers, e.g. for the professional development of employed engineers and scientists, are more compelling than the educational analysis--which focuses, briefly, on precollegiate science and mathematics education, on college level

education in engineering, and on adult literacy. The Forum concluded that, "additional specific recommendations are needed less than changes that will enhance the ability of government to act on the proposals it receives."

National Commission on Student Financial Assistance. The extensive background papers of the Congressionally-chartered Commission covered not only micro-economic analyses of specific policy issues and the economic status and behavior of specific groups of students (e.g. graduate students), but also broader questions of demography and the nature and current conditions of specific sectors of postsecondary education. Many of the latter reports and papers were condensed into a single volume, The Terrain of Postsecondary Education, that provides useful descriptive material for both policy makers and the general public.

Despite the extent and value of the descriptive material, these papers do not address the issue of quality in undergraduate education that is our primary concern. The basic data on patterns of student employment while in college, for example, are valuable to have, but this knowledge would be more valuable to us were it related to student outcomes. The declining number of American students pursuing graduate degrees in the traditional academic disciplines has serious consequences, indeed, for the future of the academic workforce. But it is hard to judge the degree of seriousness unless we also know something about the quality of both the students and the various graduate programs they pursue--neither of which Congress asked the Commission to document.

The Commission's background papers also include important reviews of both proprietary and employer-provided education, but our understanding of these areas is still hampered by unreliable data--an issue which we will address later in this report.

The National Commission on Excellence in Education

There are three reasons that our discussion of the background materials assembled by the National Commission on Excellence has been quantitatively and qualitatively different from our consideration of the other commissions. The final report of the commission and the extent of its work on higher education stimulated Dr. Justiz to appoint the Study Group and to charge us with our tasks. In addition, A Nation at Risk has dominated the national discussion of educational reform over the past year. But most importantly, the archives of the Commission were not only extensive (our staff catalogued over 500 "basic" documents), but very rich in substance; and we were privileged to have access to far more than the 41 commissioned papers listed in the appendices of A Nation at Risk. Specifically, we examined selections from:

- Testimony delivered at Commission meetings, hearings, and other public forums;
- Staff briefings and analyses of educational issues considered by the Commission;
- Letters from concerned citizens, teachers, and administrators: and
- Descriptions of notable programs and promising approaches to specific educational problems.

We look on this material as the most significant collection of artifacts representing a national discussion of quality in education in our time. While we have read them as artifacts--i.e. as products reflecting the attitudes, opinions, beliefs, and knowledge of American society in the early 1980s--we also recognize that the shape of the collection was dictated largely by the Commission's Charter. In calling for a comprehensive review of "the quality of learning and teaching in the nation's schools, colleges, and universities," Secretary Bell took care to focus the Commission's work on "the educational experience of teen-age youth." It was thus inevitable that the testimony, letters, and commissioned papers emphasize secondary education far more than either elementary education or postsecondary education. Indeed, we did not limit ourselves to those documents dealing explicitly with <u>postsecondary</u> education (even though these account for a substantial portion of the Commission's archives).

In approaching this material in ways that would help us identify the "conditions of excellence" in American higher education, we adopted a conceptual framework that was different from the one employed by the Commission. The Commission organized all of its work, analysis, and recommendations under the rubrics of Time, Content, Expectations, Teaching, and Leadership. We chose four traditional dimensions of analysis in higher education:

(1) Student clientele;

(2) Programs and learning environments of institutions;

(3) "Providers" of undergraduate baccalaureate education (colleges, community colleges, universities and other organizations); and

(4) The external influences on higher education.

We then considered how the Commission's materials were related to each dimension. Having worked with these analytical categories, and having considered the Commission's conceptual framework, we recommend that, at a minimum, NIE organize the archives of the Commission (including staff analyses, unsolicited submissions, written testimony, and miscellaneous documents) in a coherent and comprehensive fashion and place it in the ERIC system in such a form that it can be retrieved with descriptors that include both the Commission's categories and our categories. For faculty, administrators, students, parents, and others interested in the generic properties of postsecondary issues, such an organization of the archives would be useful. Even more useful would be for NIE to publish a volume containing the major background papers and materials of the Commission dealing with higher education. There are a number of creative ways to edit and arrange this material for purposes of publication; and the members of the Study Group are willing to advise NIE further on the content and shape of such a volume.

In the assessments that follow, we use our four categories and concentrate on those documents from the Commission's archives that are most directly relevant to higher education. However, we also include some materials that, while concerned with teaching and learning at the elementary and secondary levels, are also significant for higher education. These materials deal with the characteristics of effective schools, the concept of time on task, motivation and academic work, and the matter of distinguishing standards and requirements. It is our contention that higher education has much to learn from the extension of established strands of research at the school level to its domain; and it is our intention to elaborate on some of these strands in our own Final Report.

Student Clientele. The material from the NCEE archives that is most relevant to the characteristics and experience of students includes discussions of the demographics of higher education, admissions standards and practices, the transition from high school to college, and the influence of colleges on student course-taking behavior in secondary schools. There are also important papers on changes in the preparation and aspirations of entering college freshmen over the past 15 years (Astin) and the measurement of quality of student effort and its significance in understanding the achievement of college students in different types of institutions (Pace).

Of additional value are the papers on intelligence (Sternberg and Wagner), academic work (Doyle), motivation (Stipek), and time on task (Karweit). Questions asked of some of these writers by the Commission staff concerning the postsecondary dimensions of these issues--particularly motivation and academic work--are worth pursuing, particularly in light of Pace's demonstration of the predictive and diagnostic value of the "quality of effort." The content of transcripts of discussions held among Commissioners and Chicago area students only underscores the reasons for following up on these questions, as the students stressed such critical challenges of adapting to the demands of college as learning how to manage their time, negotiating bureaucratic barriers, and establishing both academic and personal identities.

Secretary Bell charged the Commission with exploring a hypothesis concerning the impact of college admissions standards "and lower division course requirements" on secondary school curricula and achievement of secondary school students. The archives reflect this focus on college

admissions. The Study Group believes it is more important to consider the ways in which students can better choose institutions, the ways colleges and universities can educate students, as implied in some of the testimony to the Commission, and the ways in which students negotiate the college environment.

From our perspective, it is the contrast between those "lower division course requirements" and the curriculum as actually experienced by students that may be most instructive. The only way to get at that contrast is through analysis of college student transcripts. The Commission staff work cited Blackburn's earlier (1976) work in this regard; but it is clear that we need a much more systematic and contemporary survey.

It is also our belief that minorities and adults have long-standing unmet claims on higher education that are not consistent with the "input approach" to quality (i.e. admit the right students, and you will have an excellent college) that the emphasis on college admission processes suggests. For example, a high proportion of minorities and adults currently participating in higher education are enrolled in community colleges and other open-door institutions. The Commission archives have some testimony on Hispanic access to higher education and profiles of outreach and retention programs. The Study Group believes there is a need for more comprehensive analyses and demonstrations of how to meet the educational needs of those who enroll in open-door institutions.

One might assume from some of the discussions surrounding A Nation at Risk that if some students and/or institutions are excellent, then others can never be excellent. The Commission itself certainly did not reach this

conclusion, but such a conventional notion about excellence is implicit in some of those documents. The Study Group believes that discussions of excellence in higher education should include consideration of individual student learning and development and differences in institutional impact on student learning and development.

In the matter of student clientele, there are questions that are more compelling to us and more relevant to postsecondary practitioners than those concerning admissions. Questions such as the following are designed to lead us toward a full understanding of the ways in which educational environments and practices result in different outcomes of postsecondary education for different kinds of students:

- What courses of action are necessary to assist students in a realistic assessment of themselves and their education?
- How should postsecondary institutions respond to shifts in the values of incoming students?
- What are the benefits of postsecondary education accruing to individuals at different levels of ability?
- What retention strategies are most effective for different student populations and how might they be implemented?

Programs and Learning Environments. The National Commission material relevant to a consideration of postsecondary programs and learning environments includes papers on such topics as general and liberal education (Gamson), the college curriculum (staff briefings and analysis), the quality of pre-service teacher education programs (Howey), and the

role of faculty in defining educational objectives and performance (Warren). Some of these papers are original contributions or cogent syntheses, and will be important starting points for our own attempts to illuminate the task of mapping the quality of learning environments in higher education.

When we approached the materials from this perspective, we were looking for detail on the relationship between program content, teaching methods, and/or the characteristics of entire institutions and what students actually learn and how they change. While we concluded that there are no systematic comparisons of different approaches to program content and internal environments in these archives, we also found several potentially productive bodies of material:

(1) The archives contain narratives and accounts of the evolution of institutional environments that seem to have made a difference--particularly in terms of student expectations and academic aspirations. Since only a few of these "case histories" were gathered, we could not perform comparative analyses to identify particular aspects of the learning environments that seem to have the greatest impact. In all fairness, though, the broader literature on higher education is sparsely populated by such ethnographic case studies.

(2) The analysis of the profiles in Starting with Students currently focuses on program structure, teaching approaches, curriculum and outcomes. While that information is instructive, we know that the profiles lying behind this report also contain information on issues such as faculty incentives, resources and transferability. We

recommend that NIE conduct a more comprehensive reanalysis of this material and make it more accessible.

There are a number of important questions on programs and learning environments that we will be refining and elaborating in the course of preparing our Final Report, questions that were stimulated more by inference than direct treatment in the background materials assembled by the Commission. These questions include:

- What teaching and learning practices and curricula lead to the minimum competencies in basic skills currently being mandated by state legislatures and postsecondary governing boards? What investments of time and dollars are required to teach these basic skills more effectively to a wide range of student groups?

- What teaching and learning practices lead to the development of higher order thinking capacities (analysis, synthesis, translation from one medium to another, knowledge utilization in different contexts, ability to perceive broad ramifications of ideas and events, etc.) in a wide range of student groups?

- What is the best way to teach scientific methods and content to non-science students?

- What is the most productive balance between general and specialist education in preparing students for work roles, family roles, and citizenship roles?

- How important is the coherence of curriculum in promoting generic learning? In increasing students' involvement in their academic environment? In increasing the quality of their effort?

- What are the effects of different forms of assessment on student learning and development?

Providers. For our purposes, a "provider" is any organization that offers formal undergraduate education that can lead to a baccalaureate degree. In higher education, this definition covers approximately 3,200 colleges, community colleges and universities, as well as some programs conducted under the auspices or corporations or public agencies.

The Study Group is concerned with the question of how higher education institutions can be more effective in undergraduate learning, and with critical institutional issues (governance, strategic planning, funding, internal resource allocation, faculty reward systems, and institutional adaptation to new markets and missions) that condition the effectiveness of colleges and universities. London's excellent treatment of the context of community colleges as they seek to meet the needs of diverse clientele and Elias Blake's testimony on the contributions of historically Black colleges are useful. To obtain a more comprehensive picture of postsecondary education, however, the Study Group believes that additional information is needed on the special problems of research universities, liberal arts colleges, regional universities, and community colleges. Because our charge is more focused on the quality factor in higher education than those of other groups, we have commissioned a series of papers on the characteristics, status, virtues and special circumstances of these major types of postsecondary institutions.

We have also commissioned and received a paper on characteristics of effective colleges and universities, and believe that that analysis can be extended in light of both the effective schools literature that is in the Commission's archives (the three papers by Farrar, Neufeld and Miles) and Michael Cohen's fine work at NIE. In preparing our Final Report, we intend to devote intense discussion to the linking of student outcomes to institutional performance and the relationship between costs and learning. The following questions will form the basis of these discussions:

- What are the organizational barriers to student learning and development, and what are some proven effective strategies for overcoming those barriers?

- Given the characteristics of effective colleges and universities, how does one achieve them?

- What are the effects of the different kinds of resources (e.g. faculty, facilities, student services) and their allocation on the quality of postsecondary education offered to different groups of students?

External Influences. In examining the Commission's background materials, the Study Group was looking for guidance and information on societal changes which affect the goals, conduct, outcomes and support for higher education. There were indirect analyses of the rise of social expectations as an influence on postsecondary education (Rudolph) and on the relationship of education to the workplace. As both the workplace and adult work roles are changing, this is an extraordinarily important topic, with complex postsecondary dimensions. The testimony to the Commission

cited rural/urban contexts for student career expectations (Dickinson), the pressures of the economy on changes in the curriculum (Schwartz), the role of cooperative education in preparing students for work (Weiss), and Federal employment and training policy (Saks). Having visited a number of corporate education programs, there is evidence that the Commission and staff thought through the problem of redundancy in our educational system and the question of who should provide what pieces of postsecondary education. But it is also evident from the archives that the Commission concluded (correctly, we would add) that we do not know enough about the problem to answer the question.

It is our intention in preparing our Final Report to pay great heed to the relationship between higher education and its external environment. In so doing, we are interested in both the macro dimensions of this topic, e.g.

- What are the benefits to <u>society</u> from educating people of different abilities through the baccalaureate level?

and the micro dimensions, e.g.

- To what extent do the various forms of accreditation promote excellence in undergraduate education?

<u>The Outcomes of Postsecondary Education</u>

The collections of background materials we examined include some information on both the outcomes of postsecondary education and ways of assessing those outcomes. But more solid data and information in these areas is extraordinarily important to the national discussion of standards and requirements in education.

The archives of the National Commission on Excellence in Education contain the most relevant material here. That material includes a set of data on 17 years (1965-1982) of standardized test scores of both high school and college graduates, and some background information on the characteristics of the test-takers. Our staff has analyzed this material, and found additional data are needed to be able to explain what has happened with these very symbolic and publicly accessible measures of student learning.

The NCEE archives also include a number of profiles of different approaches to assessment used in a variety of colleges and universities, e.g. the value-added assessment program at Northeast Missouri State, the competency-based assessment program at Alverno College, and the academic progression examinations used by the Regents of the University of Georgia. And it is evident from the archives that some of the Commissioners examined and used a few of the experimental assessment instruments (the Comprehensive Outcomes Measurement Project of the American College Testing Service and the Academic Competences in General Education Examination of the Educational Testing Service) that are slowly gaining currency in our colleges and universities. These experimental tests measure student growth in terms of higher order thinking capacities such as analysis and synthesis (and do so through a short written answer format), whereas the Commission's interests seemed to lie more in disciplinary content.

The importance of this material is underscored by a few other papers in the archives that can be categorized as "close-order thought" on the standards issue. For example, Adelman's paper, "Standards as a Leading Tone in Higher Education," is a useful analysis of some fundamental definitions which plague the national discussions about standards. And a comparative and historical treatment of the standards issue (Resnick and Resnick) provides--among other

trenchant observations--the telling notion that "American students are the most over-tested and under-assessed in the world." The paper also explores the proposition that our current collection of standardized examinations are not sufficiently tied to curriculum, and are not used very well for individual guidance and placement.

The Commission's category, "Expectations," overlaps some of what we mean by "outcomes," and the archives evidence attention to the performance expectations for college graduates as expressed by employers. A systematic study of employer-provided education is needed to clarify the anecdotal information and testimony in the archives about employer expectations. Those expectations are often expressed in the standards implicit in the content of employer screening examinations and job interviews. What employers measure through those mechanisms are, in effect, outcomes of education.

It is our intention to pay considerable attention to student outcomes and the assessment issue in our Final Report since the essence of what we do in higher education is student learning and growth.

III. Recommendations

A. Issues Concerning Data

One of the problems in research on higher education lies in the inconsistencies and noncomparabilities of the various data series available. More than one body in recent years has commented on the disconcerting ways in which we gather and use educational data. The results are damaging to the accuracy and timeliness of institutional and state-level planning and monitoring efforts, and to the appropriateness of public policies promulgated on the basis of misleading, incomplete or contradictory data.

Unfortunately, education has nothing comparable to the Bureau of Labor Statistics in terms of the comprehensiveness and accuracy of research-driven data series. Instead, and particularly in higher education, we have bits and pieces from the HEGIS system at NCES, from the Census Bureau, from ACE surveys, from information gathered from financial aid recipients, from information gathered from takers of standardized tests, etc. The contradictions and inconsistencies that result were evidenced in the background materials used by the various commissions, and were often resolved by folk wisdom, speculation, and preferred hypotheses.

It is not our function in this document to lay out a program for rectifying the situation at the Federal level. But as the current Administration (along with its predecessors) believes that one of the key Federal roles in education lies in the gathering and analysis of data, it is time to review the workings of that role and to improve the way in which it is carried out. We thus offer a variation on the recommendations made by NIE's Study Group on Postsecondary Research Centers in September, 1983:

1) We recommend that the Department of Education solicit advice from a broad cross-section of the research community and other informed parties to assess the quality of current educational data, to suggest the kinds of data series that ought to be maintained, to reconsider the processes by which such data are collected in many agencies and to recommend reporting capacities that would be useful to the educational community at large.

Beyond this fundamental reassessment, we think there are some discrete data-gathering and clarification issues that can and ought to be addressed by NIE and/or other organizations:

2) NIE should take a leadership role in the cooperative development of a systematic and continuing data base (HEGIS could serve as one starting point) for non-collegiate education and training in the United States (including the military and non-profit agencies such as the Red Cross, Girl Scouts and United Way). This cooperative effort should involve other agencies of the Department of Education, the Department of Labor, the Armed Forces Training Command, the National Center for Charitable Statistics, and the American Society for Training and Development. It is estimated that much of the data on this huge and amorphous "second system" of postsecondary education already exists in fragmented form. There are two important reasons for bringing the pieces together: (a) without the knowledge base that reliable data can provide, college and university planning will be hampered, and (b) virtually all of today's college graduates will engage in education throughout their lives, much of it in this "second system." As a Nation, we need to know more about this vital resource.

3) In order to assist in the implementation of recommendation #2, we also recommend that NIE take the leadership role within the Department of Education in revitalizing the Federal Interagency Commission on Education (FICE). A few years ago, FICE was an organization representing approximately 20 agencies of the federal government--from the military to the National Science Foundation--which had major educational missions, and produced descriptive information on those missions and programs that was useful to a wide range of constituencies. We believe that this information should once again be available.

4) We recommend the creation of a joint research advisory committee involving NIE, the National Center for Education Statistics and the Office of Postsecondary Education to conduct small seminars over the next year on the subject of transcript analysis. We make this recommendation in light of the "Postsecondary Transcript" study sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics, the first phase of which is currently being carried out by the National Opinion Research Center. This first phase involves the gathering and coding of college transcripts from those students in the "High School and Beyond" sample (Class of 1980) who have attended postsecondary institutions. The long-range effort implied by this initial step is an extremely important one since, with the exception of Blackburn's 1976 study of transcripts from a limited sample of colleges and universities, there has been no effort to examine the student experience of the postsecondary curriculum. The National Commission's study of high school transcripts demonstrated how valuable an effort such as this can be. We thus believe it to be essential that research questions be interjected at an early enough stage in the process so that the data encoded will be sufficiently malleable and productive.

5) We recommend that a systematic and comprehensive approach to the collection of data on adult learners in postsecondary baccalaureate education be implemented. Most of the information currently available about the participation of adults in undergraduate baccalaureate education is fragmented and incomplete because we can collect it principally from full-time students and can ask questions only from the student's perspective. We thus recommend that NIE, NCES, other appropriate agencies in the Department of Education and other relevant

non-federal research agencies involved in large-scale research and data collection, design and test a procedure that will both reach part-time students and gather information from the perspective of institutions of higher education.

6) We urge that NIE convene an annual meeting of the administrators of the Graduate Record and other examinations normally taken by college graduates to consider how the data generated from these examinations can be analyzed and disseminated more effectively. They should consider defining a sample control group of test-takers that can be monitored on a yearly basis so as to provide a continuing measure of achievement--at least of those American students who intend to continue their education beyond the baccalaureate level. Those who administer tests that include achievement measures for high school graduates should also be included in the meeting.

National examinations can be one way of evaluating achievement levels in those cognitive areas covered by the individual exams on a national basis. Furthermore, accurate and complete historical data concerning test scores and test-takers will allow for meaningful historical comparisons. Careful distinctions should be made between U.S. and foreign student data.

B. Research Issues

For purposes of this first report, we have chosen not to recommend yet another research agenda on postsecondary education for NIE. As we pointed out at the beginning of this document, such an agenda should be driven by recommendations for improvement that are grounded in existing knowledge. Thus, our detailed

agenda for researech and dissemination will be part of our final report, where its relationship to proposed steps for improvement will be more apparent.

Since 1976, at least five comprehensive research agendas on postsecondary education have been formally presented to the Institute. With the exception of a modest grants program that operated for a very limited period of time, those agendas have not been acted upon (a fact which, in light of declining appropriations or the Institute, is somewhat understandable). While we will be discussing them in our Final Report, we have already examined those agendas, and have found them, in the main, commendable. We also commend the current joint efforts of NIE and the office of the Assistant Secretary for Postsecondary Education to identify a limited number of research topics of mutual interest and to seek special funding for those topics. We hope that the issues ultimately selected will cover more than Federal policy concerns (e.g. student financial aid).

We have chosen, however, to offer a general recommendation that bears upon an important set of decisions NIE is about to make concerning the recompetition of national research centers in FY 1985. NIE will shortly choose a set of 9-12 missions for the research centers. We note that the Institute has received a great deal of advice concerning those missions through public hearings, study groups and panels. We wish to add ours here. If there is no other research on postsecondary education that NIE can fund in the coming years from the discretionary portion of its budget, national research leadership in postsecondary education will be focused in one or more of those missions:

7) Having examined the record of input into the Lab and Center competition planning process, and drawing on our own experience of what makes research centers work best in the public interest, we

recommend that the focus of Center research on postsecondary education be related to student learning, student development, and student outcomes. We recommend that the postsecondary Centers offer a strong dissemination and knowledge utilization program. Were the postsecondary Center missions to be phrased in such terms, there should be a sufficient number of applicants to allow NIE to select the best. We believe that the public and its representatives will understand and strongly endorse such an approach to research on postsecondary education.

IV. Conclusion: on to the Blueprint for the Conditions of Excellence

This report is partially a map of our progress to date. It is also intended to illustrate the lines of analysis we will be pursuing in generating both a blueprint for improvement in higher education and a research and knowledge utilization agenda to match that blueprint. We are concerned, but optimistic. We know that there is a great deal of work left to be done by our postsecondary institutions. Our focus in that blueprint will thus be very clear: on an increasingly diverse body of students, on the institutions most immediately responsible for their learning and growth, and on adequate and appropriate evidence of that learning and growth.

By the time this report is released by Dr. Justiz, we will be hard at work drafting sections of our blueprint. Our timetable calls for completion of this task by early June, 1984. We will then refine our blueprint and develop a research and knowledge-utilization agenda that springs from the objectives and procedures recommended for improvement. Our Final Report should be available for Institute review by early August, 1984, and for release and discussion at a special dissemination meeting with members of the higher education community in

early September. This dissemination, and the thoughtful action we intend it to engender, is critical to fulfilling our charge. Since the days of Socrates, the Academy has cited the maxim that "the unexamined life is not worth living." It is our intention to stimulate the Academy to examine its own life more carefully.

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